



Protect Children and Free Speech on the Internet

**TESTIMONY OF
GORDON ROSS, PRESIDENT AND CEO
NET NANNY SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL, INC.**

BEFORE THE

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

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Mr. Chairman, members, and staff of the Commerce Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to offer my expertise and thoughts on the issue of protecting children online and how technological solutions, combined with important Internet education initiatives and sufficient funding for law enforcement can help provide a positive experience for our children as they travel on the Information Superhighway.

The Internet is a wonderful new global medium; I call it the "10th Planet," with no borders, no jurisdictions and no way of being controlled from the top down by any one single entity. It provides excellent educational resources and ways for our children to communicate and it gives people access to information and to each other that has never before been possible. A vast majority of the material available on the Internet is positive, but just like the physical world there are bad neighborhoods with material that is shocking and inappropriate for young eyes and there are people who use the anonymous nature of the Internet to hide their identities and build relationships with our children. In some cases, people who

don't have the best interests of our children in mind are using this medium to lure them into dangerous physical and emotional situations, but it is important to stress that this is not the common experience that our children are experiencing. Just as we teach our children not to talk to strangers and we hold the hands of small children as they cross the street, we must educate them on ways to navigate this "virtual" world safely and what to do if bad things happen and we need to make sure that those responsible for their care, understand that there are many different tools and resources available to help make the Internet a safe and enjoyable place.

As a grandfather and a computer industry leader with over 30 years of telecommunications and computer security experience, starting with my communications training in the U.S. military, several years of experience as a network systems manager with a major telecommunications company and my present position as the President and CEO of one of the most widely recognized filtering companies in the world, I clearly understand that technology plays a key role in protecting children online and always will, but it only one part of the solution – it cannot single-handedly accomplish the goal of protecting children online.

I am not here today to espouse the attributes of my product or challenge the attributes of my competitors' products. The healthy spirit of competition is enabling the market to continue to deliver to people worldwide a variety of tools, including my own, that provide one important component in a three-pronged strategy to provide a safer online environment. Through responses to consumer demand, companies such as my own continue to offer new, innovative features to our products that, combined with broadly supported Internet education initiatives and effective law enforcement funding and participation, are giving parents and other caregivers a variety of ways to empower themselves to protect children

online. While I will discuss a few specific ways that filtering technology can protect our children, and I'm sure that you will have questions of your own, I believe it is important to discuss more than just the differences and nuances of filtering technology. It is important to talk about a few of the wonderful projects past and present that my Company continues to promote that illustrate the benefits of working hand-in-hand with other concerned industry leaders, civil liberty and child advocacy groups, state, local and federal law enforcement agencies, library and school boards, parents, teachers, as well as Congress and other governmental agencies. Partnerships are crucial if we are to succeed in building confidence in the Internet and providing for the safety and welfare of children as they venture online.

- We were proud to be a sponsor, member of the steering committee and participant of the Internet Online Summit in December 1997, where over 600 people from a wide variety of technology companies, non-profits, law enforcement and governmental agencies came together for the first time to explore ways to make children's online experiences more positive.
- A commitment established at the Internet Online Summit resulted in the creation of the America Links Up campaign, another broad-based Internet education initiative, that we sponsor and helped to organize. It was launched in September 1998 in Washington, DC and continues to make a major impact across the nation through the execution of close to 500 "teach-ins" for parents, teachers, librarians and other interested parties. We were proud to hold our own grassroots effort with AT&T and Microsoft in the Seattle area last November.
- Efforts are currently underway to explore ways to make information and technological resources more easily accessible, indeed "One Click Away," where ever people go on the Internet, so they don't have to look far for great information on technology tools, educational resources and ways to contact law enforcement when it is necessary.
- We are excited about a project that we are working on with a very special

Seattle Vice Detective, Leanne Shirey. Involved with investigating the sexual exploitation of children on and offline, she saw firsthand the incredible need to create a comprehensive educational program for parents, educators and law enforcement that would educate them about computer and Internet basics, how pedophiles lure unsuspecting children into potentially dangerous situations and what can be done to protect children. On her personal time, she developed the curriculum and built a coalition of federal, state and local law enforcement and computer experts from the corporate sector who volunteer their time to educate the community. Her efforts caught the eye of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and her program called, "The Internet and Your Child" is now being developed into a training program for law enforcement across the country and abroad. Over 90% of the state and local police forces have less than 50 officers. Budgets are very tight, local agencies are understaffed and officers are untrained. This program will help them to get crucial training that might otherwise be unavailable. We are very proud to be a part of a public-private partnership of people who are volunteering their time to create a training program to teach these officers about child safety and Internet crime and what they can do to help. As the medium grows, so does the criminal element. Law enforcement must be prepared to address the needs in their individual communities.

- I am looking forward to meeting with the American Library Association and CEOs from several other filtering companies next week in Chicago to discuss the state of filtering technology. I commend the ALA for convening such an important meeting so that they can learn more about how this technology works and how it might be able to co-exist peacefully with the missions of public libraries.
- I was also honored to be invited by the OECD Secretariat to participate in a panel on Internet content in March of last year. Working with the global community on effective strategies to protect our children is vital. The United States cannot solve this issue alone.
- I have had the opportunity to sit on several panels involving filtering technology and the First Amendment, sponsored by the Freedom Forum and am looking forward to another one next month, sponsored by the New York Bar Association, that will explore child pornography and First Amendment issues. I am a staunch supporter of the First Amendment and believe that it is vital that we protect these rights in the online world.

It is an honor to be associated with companies such as AT&T and Microsoft, non-profits such as the Center for Democracy and Technology, the Electronic Privacy Information Coalition, the Freedom Forum, the People for the American Way, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Center for Missing and Exploited

Children, the American Library Association, CyberAngels, Enough is Enough, Safeguarding Our Children, United Mothers and others, as well as highly committed local police officers such as Leanne Shirey and federal law enforcement agencies such as US Customs and the FBI. Working with Congressional members in both houses and on both sides of the aisle, through our membership on the US Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory Committee and through opportunities to testify, such as I have been given today are very important to me personally and to my company as we continue to grow and to appropriately address the many important challenges associated with the growth of the Internet.

Net Nanny was the first filtering technology introduced to the market in January 1995. It was a pioneer then and it continues to set important standards, such as its First Amendment friendly way of disclosing its blocking criteria and allowing people to see and control what is blocked. It is vital that the control is put into the hands of those who are deploying the technology. There are now close to 90 different solutions from which parents and educators can choose that address just about every different need and value system. While technology is not a silver bullet, it is definitely an important tool for people to have in their toolbox. Using Net Nanny as an example, here's what filtering technology is capable of doing:

- Block out content involving pornography, illegal drugs, bomb-making formulas, hate literature and other material that the administrator decides is inappropriate.
- Create lists of positive sites that are safe and educational for children.
- Provide a log of Web sites visited and content sent and received in email, chat and instant messaging systems.
- Prevent names, addresses, telephone numbers, credit card numbers and other personal information from being sent out over the Internet.
- Work together with controls included in browsers and online services to block access to pictures, video and other inappropriate content.
- Allow the administrator of the software to see every site that is included on its suggested lists of blocked sites.

- **Allow administrators to immediately add or delete sites based on their own unique needs and values.**
- **Give the software owner complete and unconditional control over each and every site in the software's database, allowing it to be viewed, added or deleted with a few keystrokes.**
- **Scan Web pages before they are loaded to determine if the content is acceptable according to a parent's values or an institution's policy**
- **Distinguish between sites having important educational value and those involving material generally considered inappropriate for children. The days of software filters mistakenly blocking sites with information on breast cancer and safe sex are long gone and people who have really taken the time to update themselves on how the technology works today, know this to be true.**

I commend your thoughtful consideration of these issues and high-profile efforts to shed light on these very important issues. As you can see, your participation in the efforts to protect children online is vital and has catalyzed industry, non-profits, law enforcement, parents, teachers, libraries and others to work together to come up with a wide variety of effective solutions. We all need to be "on their toes", paying attention and constantly searching for new and innovative ways to provide for child safety – we MUST work together!

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.